# IN THE EXECUTIVE ETHICS COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

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IN RE:

YOLANDA VILLA

OEIG Case #17-00403

### OEIG FINAL REPORT (REDACTED)

Below is a final summary report from an Executive Inspector General. The General Assembly has directed the Executive Ethics Commission (Commission) to redact information from this report that may reveal the identity of witnesses, complainants or informants and "any other information it believes should not be made public." 5 ILCS 430/20-52(b).

The Commission exercises this responsibility with great caution and with the goal of balancing the sometimes-competing interests of increasing transparency and operating with fairness to the accused. In order to balance these interests, the Commission may redact certain information contained in this report. The redactions are made with the understanding that the subject or subjects of the investigation have had no opportunity to rebut the report's factual allegations or legal conclusions before the Commission.

The Commission received this report from the Governor's Office of Executive Inspector General ("OEIG") and a response from the agency in this matter. The Commission, pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52, redacted the final report and mailed copies of the redacted version and responses to the Attorney General, the Executive Inspector General for the Governor, and to Yolanda Villa at her last known address.

The Commission reviewed all suggestions received and makes this document available pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52.

### FINAL REPORT

### I. ALLEGATIONS

On March 3, 2017, the Office of Executive Inspector General (OEIG) received a complaint alleging that Illinois Department of Veteran's Affairs (IDVA) Veterans' Nursing Assistant-Certified (Nursing Assistant) Yolanda Villa failed to notify the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) that her gross income exceeded the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Gross Monthly Income Standard, causing her to receive SNAP benefits that she was not qualified to receive while an employee of IDVA.

### II. BACKGROUND

### A. Yolanda Villa

Yolanda Villa has been employed by IDVA since May 2016. She is a Nursing Assistant at the Veterans' Home in LaSalle, Illinois, where she assists residents with their daily routines and performs treatment measures as directed by nurses.

### B. SNAP

SNAP is a program administrated by DHS that is "designed to help people buy food by supplementing the cash they have available to buy food." Benefits are provided on an Illinois Link card, a card that works like a debit card to allow users to purchase food at most grocery stores.<sup>2</sup>

DHS' policy manual states that SNAP customers have the obligation of reporting certain changes in earned and unearned income.<sup>3</sup> SNAP customers with earned income, which includes Ms. Villa, are classified as a Mid-Point Reporting Unit and are responsible for reporting when their gross income exceeds the SNAP Gross Monthly Income Standard for their unit size.<sup>4</sup>

### I. INVESTIGATION

In this investigation, the OEIG obtained and reviewed documents, including Ms. Villa's IDVA personnel file, SNAP application, Recipient Ledger Inquiry records, Automated Wage Verification System records, and Ms. Villa's Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) Personnel History Inquiry (Expanded). In addition, the OEIG interviewed DHS [Employee 1] and IDVA employee Yolanda Villa.

### A. Examination Of Yolanda Villa's SNAP Benefits

DHS Workers' Action Guide (WAG) 25-06-05-b(2) sets out the maximum levels of income a person can receive and still be eligible for SNAP benefits. Those maximum income levels depend on the number of people in the household and are adjusted over time. From January 1 through September 30, 2016, the maximum monthly gross income for a household of three people was \$2,763.00. Thereafter it became \$2,772.00. The OEIG reviewed Ms. Villa's CMS Personnel History Inquiry (Expanded). It reflects that from May through November 2016 Ms. Villa's monthly gross salary as an IDVA employee was \$2,951.00.

A review of Ms. Villa's SNAP application and the accompanying case notes reflect that on October 19, 2015, Ms. Villa applied to receive SNAP benefits for herself and her two minor children. In November 2015, Ms. Villa was approved to receive SNAP benefits through October 2016. At that time, according to notes in her casefile, a DHS employee determined that Ms. Villa was eligible to receive \$456.00 per month in SNAP benefits. In October 2016 the amount increased to \$464.00.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> DHS Policy Manual § I-05-01.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30357 (last accessed March 1, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> DHS Policy Manual § 18-04-00.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> DHS Policy Manual § 19-07-01.

The OEIG obtained and reviewed a DHS Notice of Decision, dated November 25, 2015, and addressed to Ms. Villa, which states, in part, that Ms. Villa would receive \$456.00 per month in SNAP benefits. The OEIG also obtained and reviewed a DHS form with Ms. Villa's name printed at the top and dated October 22, 2015. The form is titled "YOU HAVE CERTAIN RESPONSIBILITIES" and informs the reader that he or she is responsible for letting the local office know "right away" if, among other things, his or her income changes for any reason.

The OEIG requested and obtained from DHS all records related to Ms. Villa's SNAP benefits from June 1, 2015 until April 19, 2017. DHS provided no documents or case notes that reflect Ms. Villa reported any change in income or that her income exceeded the SNAP Gross Monthly Income Standard for a household of three at any point. The DHS Recipient Ledger Inquiry, which is a document that shows, among other things, the date SNAP benefits were posted to a SNAP account and the amount posted, reflects that from June through September 2016, Ms. Villa's SNAP account received \$456.00 per month and \$464.00 in October 2016. Case notes obtained by the OEIG indicate that Ms. Villa reapplied for SNAP benefits in October 2016, listing her IDVA salary, and was denied.

### B. Interview Of DHS [Employee 1]

On December 6, 2017 and March 8, 2018, the OEIG interviewed DHS [Employee 1]. [Employee 1] said that, since 2001, her duties include supervising DHS employees who investigate instances where DHS clients receive benefits over the amount that they are entitled to receive. [Employee 1] said that she reviewed Ms. Villa's case prior to speaking with the OEIG. [Employee 1] said that Ms. Villa applied for SNAP benefits electronically on October 19, 2015.

[Employee 1] explained that when a client is approved to receive SNAP benefits, he or she is typically sent a letter that informs the client of the maximum monthly gross income allowed for his or her household to receive SNAP benefits. She said the letter also instructs the client that, if his or her household receives more than the maximum monthly gross income, the client is to report this to the local DHS office by the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the next month.<sup>5</sup> [Employee 1] said that, based on Ms. Villa's IDVA income, she exceeded her maximum monthly gross income in June 2016 because her monthly gross income was more than \$2,763.00 and that Ms. Villa should have reported this to her local DHS office by July 10, 2016.<sup>6</sup> [Employee 1] explained that if Ms. Villa had reported this information her SNAP benefits would have stopped in August 2016 and she would not have received them in August, September, or October 2016. She said that this resulted in Ms. Villa receiving a total of \$1,376.00 in overpayments. [Employee 1] said that DHS is attempting to recover this overpayment from Ms. Villa.<sup>7</sup>

### C. Interview Of IDVA Employee Yolanda Villa

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ms. Villa's casefile did not include any such letter, nor has DHS provided the OEIG with a copy of Ms. Villa's letter as requested.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> [Employee 1] explained that Ms. Villa began her employment with IDVA in May 2016 but, because of the pay schedule, she only received one paycheck that month. Therefore, the income she received did not exceed the maximum monthly gross income amount until June 2016 when she received two paychecks.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> As of the date of this report, Ms. Villa's account is deemed delinquent and DHS has not recovered any of the overpayment.

On February 7, 2018, the OEIG interviewed Yolanda Villa. Ms. Villa confirmed that since May 2016 she has been employed as a Nursing Assistant with IDVA at a Veterans' Home in LaSalle, IL. Ms. Villa said she does not currently receive SNAP benefits but she has received them on and off since 2007.

The OEIG showed Ms. Villa the October 19, 2015, application for benefits which she acknowledged she submitted. Ms. Villa said that at the time she applied for SNAP benefits she was working full time but still qualified because her income was below the maximum. She said she cannot remember the maximum income she could receive and still be eligible for SNAP benefits and does not remember if she was told the amount. Ms. Villa said that she received approximately \$250.00 per month in SNAP benefits after her application was approved.<sup>8</sup>

When asked if she ever received SNAP benefits she was not entitled to receive, Ms. Villa responded that she did when she started working for IDVA in May 2016. Ms. Villa said she did not know for how long she received benefits to which she was not entitled. When told that records reflect that she received an overpayment of SNAP benefits from August through October 2016, Ms. Villa agreed that this is probably correct. Ms. Villa said she believes the overpayment was around \$750.00, not \$1,376.00, based on her estimate of receiving \$250.00 per month in SNAP benefits. When asked whether she used the overpayment, Ms. Villa said that she did use it to buy food and there is no money left in her SNAP account. Ms. Villa acknowledged that, while she should have informed someone at DHS that her household received more than the maximum monthly gross income amount after she started working for IDVA, she did not do so. Ms. Villa said she does not know why she did not inform her local DHS office but she was "mostly" waiting to inform DHS when she renewed her application to receive SNAP benefits.

### II. ANALYSIS

The IDVA employee personal conduct policy states that "An employee holds a position of public trust and is expected to conduct himself/herself in a responsible, professional manner, refraining from conduct which could adversely affect the confidence of the public." 9

Ms. Villa began working for IDVA in May 2016. In June 2016 her income exceeded the \$2,763.00 maximum SNAP Gross Monthly Income Standard for a family of three, and she failed to inform anyone in her local DHS office of the change in her income until she reapplied for benefits in October 2016 and was denied. The Notice of Decision DHS sent to Ms. Villa informed her she had a responsibility to inform her local office if her income changed for any reason. During her OEIG interview, Ms. Villa acknowledged that she should have informed DHS that her income had increased, and she could not explain why she did not do so. Her failure to report her change in income resulted in Ms. Villa improperly receiving \$1,376.00 in SNAP benefits over the course of three months.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> As stated above, the DHS Recipient Ledger Inquiry reflects that from June through September 2016 Ms. Villa received \$456.00 per month and in October 2016 she received \$464.00 in SNAP benefits.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> IDVA Employee Handbook, Rules of Conduct, Employee Personal Conduct (April 2014).

Based on the foregoing, there is reasonable cause to believe that Ms. Villa failed to report to DHS that in June 2016 her monthly income exceeded the maximum monthly gross income standard which resulted in an overpayment of SNAP benefits. As a result, Ms. Villa improperly received SNAP benefits for three months. This conduct could adversely affect the confidence of the public, and this allegation is **FOUNDED**.<sup>10</sup>

### III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of its investigation, the OEIG concludes that there is **REASONABLE CAUSE TO ISSUE THE FOLLOWING FINDING:** 

➤ **FOUNDED** – Yolanda Villa violated IDVA policy by failing to notify DHS that her income exceeded the maximum monthly gross income which resulted in her receiving an overpayment of SNAP benefits in August, September, and October 2016.

Based on the findings, the OEIG recommends that IDVA take whatever disciplinary action it deems appropriate regarding Ms. Villa.

No further investigative action is needed and this case is considered closed.

Date: May 24, 2018

Office of Executive Inspector General for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor 607 East Adams, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor Springfield, IL 62701

Jamiela Kassem Deputy Inspector General

Melissa Brandenburg Investigator #160

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The OEIG concludes that an allegation is "founded" when it has determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that a violation of law or policy has occurred, or that there has been fraud, waste, mismanagement, misconduct, nonfeasance, misfeasance, or malfeasance.



### Office of Executive Inspector General

for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor www.inspectorgeneral.illinois.gov

### AGENCY OR ULTIMATE JURISDICTIONAL AUTHORITY **RESPONSE FORM**

Case	Number: <u>17-00403</u>	Return 20 Days After Receipt
Pleas	se check the box that applies. (Ple	ase attach additional materials, as necessary.)
□ action	We have implemented all of the one taken:	DEIG recommendations. Please provide details as to
X		he OEIG recommendations but will require additionaldays from the original return dateBy
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Signa	ature	Print Agency and Job Title COUNSEL
***********	SABETH PENNIX Name	JUNE 13, 2018  Date



# OFFICE OF EXECUTIVE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR THE AGENCIES OF THE ILLINOIS GOVERNOR

607 EAST ADAMS, 14<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62701-1634

### CONFIDENTIAL

RECEIVED
JUL 17 2018

July 17, 2018

EXECUTIVE ETHICS COMMISSION

Via Electronic and U.S. Mail
Chad Fornoff, Executive Director
Executive Ethics Commission
401 South Spring Street
513 William Stratton Building
Springfield, IL 62706

**Re:** OEIG Case No. 17-00403

Dear Executive Director Fornoff:

I previously sent you the Summary Report in this matter on June 14, 2018.

As indicated in the attached response, the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) has imposed a 30 day suspension, consisting of a 15 day paper suspension and a 15 day actual suspension, effective July 10, 2018.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (217) 558-0900.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Haling Acting Executive Inspector General

By: Thomas Klein

Deputy Inspector General and Chief of the Springfield Division

cc: File

Encl: IDVA response dated July 6, 2018,

IDVA discipline for Yolanda Villa dated July 9, 2018.



### STATE OF ILLINOIS

## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

100 W. RANDOLPH STREET, SUITE 5-570, CHICAGO, IL 60601-3219 TELEPHONE: 312/814-2460\* FAX: 312/814-2764 \* TDD: 217/524-4645

BRUCE RAUNER GOVERNOR

STEPHEN CURDA DIRECTOR

July 6, 2018

Via Electronic Mail
Executive Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
For the Agencies of the Illinois Governor
69 W. Washington Street, Suite 3400
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: OEIG Complaint No. 17-00403

Dear Ms. Haling,

On May 24, 2018, we received the Final Summary Report in the subject matter. Your referral indicated a response due date of July 6, 2018.

In response, we are attaching via e-mail, two documents: 1) an email from our HR Director, Mark Sherbeyn, indicating that a pre-disciplinary meeting for the subject is scheduled for July 9<sup>th</sup> wherein the subject faces a 30-day suspension; and 2) a Statement of Charges that will be referenced at the pre-disciplinary hearing concerning the wrongful conduct of the subject.

Please let us know if we can provide any further amplifying information. We consider this matter resolved. I can be reached at (312) 814-5391 or by email at <a href="mailto:Elisabeth.Pennix@illinois.gov">Elisabeth.Pennix@illinois.gov</a>.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Pennix

General Counsel & Ethics Officer

Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Attachmenst: Email dated July 5, 2018; Statement of Charges

Cc: Christina McClernon - Office of the Governor; via email: Christina. McClernon@illinois.gov

From: To: Sherbeyn, Mark A. Pennix, Elisabeth H.

Subject:

OEIG Case No. 17-00403 Final Report

Date:

Thursday, July 5, 2018 2:02:02 PM

Lis,

A pre-disciplinary meeting is scheduled for July  $9^{th}$  at the LaSalle Veterans' Home for Yolanda Villa referencing this case. The

Ms. Villa's employee record was reviewed as well as discussing the issue with the NHA Sherri Whitmer. It was determined that Ms. Villa faces a 30 day suspension, 15 day paper and 15 day actual.

Please advise if you need any additional information regarding this matter.

Mark Sherbeyn Human Resources Manager Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Office: (217)-782-5765 Cell: (217)-720-8111

State of Illinois - CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: The information contained in this communication is confidential, may be attorney-client privileged or attorney work product, may constitute inside information or internal deliberative staff communication, and is intended only for the use of the addressee. Unauthorized use, disclosure or copying of this communication or any part thereof is strictly prohibited and may be unlawful. If you have received this communication in error, please notify the sender immediately by return e-mail and destroy this communication and all copies thereof, including all attachments. Receipt by an unintended recipient does not waive attorney-client privilege, attorney work product privilege, or any other exemption from disclosure.

### **Statement of Charges**

Villa, Yolanda Veterans' Nursing Assistant-Certified

### Charges:

Ms. Villa is charged with violations of the Department's Personal Conduct Rules in that:

Ms. Villa began employment with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs on May 2, 2016. On May 24, 2018, it was founded that Ms. Villa failed to notify the Illinois Department of Human Services that her income exceeded the maximum monthly gross during August, September and October of 2016 causing her to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits that she was not qualified to receive while an employee of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs.

### Policies and Rules Violated:

### IL Veterans' Home at LaSalle Personal Conduct Rules for Employees

19. Conduct unbecoming an IDVA employee including conduct detrimental to good order and discipline and/or having a detrimental impact upon the reputation of the Home or the Department.

### IDVA Employee Handbook-Rules of Conduct

**Employee Personal Conduct** 

Page 21

An employee holds a position of public trust and is expected to conduct himself/herself in a responsible, professional manner, refraining from conduct which could adversely affect the confidence of the public. An employee who violates the public trust or fails to conduct himself/herself in a professional manner is subject to discipline up to and including discharge.

### **Prior Discipline:**

### **Mandation Refusal**

1/25/18 6/19/18 Oral reprimand Written reprimand

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**Affirmative Attendance** 

2/5/17

Oral reprimand

5/10/17 6/6/17 Written reprimand 2<sup>nd</sup> written reprimand

Personal Conduct Rules

1/25/18

Oral reprimand

Data Record
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First\_Name: YOLANDA
SSN\_Last4:
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### Statement of Charges

Villa, Yolanda Veterans' Nursing Assistant-Certified Pre-disciplinary Meeting held 7/09/18 Rebuttal received 7/09/18 Fifteen (15) Day Paper Suspension Fifteen (15) Day Actual Suspension

#### Charges:

Ms. Villa is charged with violations of the Department's Personal Conduct Rules in that:

Ms. Villa began employment with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs on May 2, 2016. On May 24, 2018, it was founded that Ms. Villa failed to notify the Illinois Department of Human Services that her income exceeded the maximum monthly gross during August, September and October of 2016 causing her to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits that she was not qualified to receive while an employee of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs.

#### Policies and Rules Violated:

### IL Veterans' Home at LaSalle Personal Conduct Rules for Employees

 Conduct unbecoming an IDVA employee including conduct detrimental to good order and discipline and/or having a detrimental impact upon the reputation of the Home or the Department.

### IDVA Employee Handbook-Rules of Conduct

**Employee Personal Conduct** 

### Page 21

An employee holds a position of public trust and is expected to conduct himself/herself in a responsible, professional manner, refraining from conduct which could adversely affect the confidence of the public. An employee who violates the public trust or fails to conduct himself/herself in a professional manner is subject to discipline up to and including discharge.

### Prior Discipline:

### **Mandation Refusal**

1/25/18 Oral reprimand 6/19/18 Written reprimand

### Personal Conduct Rules

1/25/18 Oral reprimand

### **Affirmative Attendance**

2/5/17 Oral reprimand
5/10/17 Written reprimand
6/6/17 2<sup>nd</sup> written reprimand
5/16/18 Three (3) day suspension